OFFICE OF THE BISHOP

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THE USE OF ALCOHOL AT CHURCH FUNCTIONS

The Episcopal Church has never taken a stance endorsing the prohibition of the use of beverages containing alcohol among her members. In fact, the Episcopal Church Teaching Series book, The Christian Moral Vision states--"Most Episcopalians have accepted wine as a gift of God, to be used with thanksgiving. The wine of the Eucharist serves as a symbol of God's blessing on the fruit of the vine." (p. 71) Our church, in accordance with its tradition of moderation and balance, recognizes that alcohol can be used wisely.

However, the Episcopal Church also recognizes that where there is a potential for good, there is often a potential for evil; nowhere is this more evident than in the use of alcoholic beverages. Alcoholism is an illness which has reached epidemic proportions in our own society and culture; for that reason, it is imperative that the members of the Church use the same prudence regarding the use and serving of alcoholic beverages that they would use in handling any other potentially dangerous drug. Although the social use of beverage alcohol may be permitted for those who choose to use it responsibly, the Church has a further responsibility for those people, who, for one reason or another, choose to abstain from the use of alcoholic beverages.

Therefore, the following ideas are given for the serving and use of alcoholic beverages at Church functions or on Church property within the Diocese of Pennsylvania:

(1) Any beverage which contains alcohol must always be clearly labelled as such; this applies to any food (such as fruit compotes, desserts, etc.) where the alcohol has not been volatized (i.e., "cooked out"). The reasons for this are two-fold: First, some people choose not to drink for medical (allergy) or personal reasons; and second, some medications when mixed with alcohol can produce serious side effects.

(2) We believe that alcohol is not appropriate to serve at every church sponsored function, but if it is served in any form, non-alcoholic alternatives must always be offered. Non-alcoholic beverages must be served with the same attractiveness and accessibility as those containing alcohol, so that people who choose not to drink alcoholic beverages need not feel any embarrassment, discomfort, or inconvenience in exercising their preference.

(3) Although beverages and other foods containing alcohol may be offered, together with non-alcoholic alternatives, they must never be promoted in such a way as to imply that partaking of them is any kind of social requirement.

(4) Alcoholic beverages cannot be sold without a license; to do so is in violation of Pennsylvania State Law.

(5) All other applicable Federal, State and Local Laws and Ordinances, including those governing the serving of alcoholic beverages to minors, must be observed.

(6) Any occasion at which alcoholic beverages are to be offered should not be openly advertised. The group of people sponsoring the event should be either a parish organization or a group of members of the parish.

(7) Although these guidelines recognize the positive social value of the use of alcoholic beverages, they also recognize that drunkenness is always unacceptable social behavior; care must be taken to insure that responsible persons are in control of the serving of alcoholic beverages. The group or organization sponsoring the activity at which alcoholic beverages are served should be aware that some persons may become intoxicated. Therefore, these persons will require assistance returning home. In some cases, alternate transportation will be necessary.

(8) It is the duty of the Priest in charge of the congregation or, in his/her absence, the Senior Warden and the Vestry, to assume responsibility for the dissemination of and the observance of these guidelines.

(9) Invitations to affairs held on parish premises at which alcoholic beverages are to be offered should be issued only to the congregation, parish organizations, their guests and friends.

The Diocese of Pennsylvania is indebted to the Diocese of Maryland's Committee on Alcoholism for permission to reprint many of the above guidelines